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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 002632

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: PUBLIC ANGER CONTINUES; SOME VIOLENCE;
LEADERS CALL FOR CALM

REF: A. ANKARA 2620

1B. ANKARA 2605

1C. ANKARA 2624

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, for Reasons 1.4 (b
,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Demonstrations of public anger continue on a widespread basis. Although anti-American sentiment colors the protests, most are largely focused on rage at the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Violence has been limited, but a potentially explosive situation remains. Leaders of all stripes are working to manage the public, not stir it up. Meanwhile, some are feeling the pinch of this apparent "national unity." END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Angry protests across the country continue (ref A). As expected, yesterday's funerals for the 12 soldiers turned into massive demonstrations against the PKK; papers generously claimed 1 million collectively attended the funerals. Protests also took place in Istanbul, Burdur, Mersin, Giresun, Zonguldak, Izmir, Kocaeli, Canakkale, and Adiyaman, as well as at universities. Protesters carried flags and shouted slogans against terrorism and the PKK. They also shouted that Turks and Kurds are brothers, but the PKK is committing treason. Ankara's 10,000 person demonstration urged government action against the PKK and included some anti-US slogans. In Izmir, demonstrators reportedly chanted, "The US murdered our soldiers!" and "The US is behind the PKK." In the Sisli district of Istanbul, demonstrators chanted, "Down with the PKK, collaborator US!" Police expect more of the same today. Again, the spontaneous nature of the protests makes it difficult to predict.

13. (C) Violence has been very limited and quickly brought under control by police. In an Izmir campus demonstration, 300 students clashed with what Cumhuriyet daily characterized as PKK supporters. In Ankara, a street vendor fired into the air in front of pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) headquarters (see ref B for other DTP-focused public anger since October 21) and was detained by plainclothes policemen. An explosive device burned itself out (no explosion) in front of the AKP sub-provincial office in Kecioren, Ankara. (Note: The connection to current events is uncertain; police suspect Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (MLKP) involvement based on their initial investigation.)

¶4. (C) But violence lingers just under the surface, and public officials are attempting to manage the outpouring of grief and anger. In Ankara, many district mayors are working to channel the public's energy by organizing various marches, a bicycle march, a visit to martyrs' graves, and other gatherings designed to "enhance feelings of national unity." All Ankara district municipalities have canceled music, entertainment, and celebration activities for Turkey's October 29 Republic Day holiday. In Istanbul the municipality cancelled daytime musical entertainment but has reportedly opted to go ahead with evening fireworks. The military parade and other ceremonies organized by the governor's office will go forward as originally planned.

¶5. (C) COMMENT. Leaders across the spectrum have shown remarkable presence in praising the public's expression of sentiment while urging continued non-violence and restraint (ref C), even as government opponents press the GOT to make use of parliament's authorization for a cross-border operation. Officials are acutely aware that the greatest risk right now is a spark that could ignite an explosive inter-ethnic battle. On a smaller scale, public space for discussion and debate is being constrained by the new terms of political correctness. University students at an NGO-offered course told an Embassy officer they were uncomfortable with the pressure from their peers to wear all black; a Kurdish student in the class (normally a bit of a loudmouth and troublemaker), sat in silence. END COMMENT.

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